

PANEL

I

THE IDEAS OF BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI IN THE THIRTIETH YEAR SINCE HIS DEATH AND THEIR PLACE IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

ŞERİF MARDİN
MİM KEMAL ÖKE
İBRAHİM CÂNAN
ÂDEM TATLI
URSULA SPULER
AHMET AKGÜNDÜZ
COLIN TURNER
M. SALİM ABDULLAH
SAFÂ MÜRSEL
ŞÜKRAN VAHİDE

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M. SALIM ABDULLAH

*Director of the Central Institute of Islamic Archives,
Germany*

Salim Abdullah was born in Germany in 1931. He works as a newspaper reporter and writer, and as a producer for The Voice of Germany Radio. He is the director of the journal Moslemische Revue and the Islamic News Agency, and is also director of the Central Islamic Archives in the town of Soest. Since 1988 Salim Abdullah has represented the Islamic Congress at the United Nations and has been a member of the governing board of the World Islamic Congress in Karachi in Pakistan. He is President of the German Islamic Council. Among his published works are the following (in German):

- 1. The Muslims Among Us (1974).*
- 2. The Possibilities of Christian and Islamic Dialogue (1976).*
- 3. Islam in the Backyard in Germany (1980).*
- 4. ISLAM: The Assistant of Progress in Brief (1982).*
- 5. Living According to Islam (1982).*
- 6. ISLAM: A World Superpower (1983).*
- 7. Islam Under the Protection of the Prussian Eagle (1984).*
- 8. "And the King Gave Them His Word...." (1987).*
- 9. History of the Muslim Minority in Germany (1987).*
- 10. Introduction and Hadith Supplement to the Meaning of the Qur'an in German (1987).*

MY MEETING IN THE SPIRIT WITH SAID NURSI

Like lighthouses show the way to ships in the night, many just such men and women have appeared in Islamic history. Filled with love of Almighty God, they have become light-giving personalities like lighthouses. Through the superlative examples to others of their lives and through their advanced knowledge which they put into practice down to the finest details, they have become 'exemplary models in the way of God.'

Said Nursi Hazretleri was one of these. He was known by many people as Bediuzzaman, the Wonder of the Age.

Although Said Nursi died comparatively recently, in 1960, I had no opportunity to meet him. But I have met his students in Germany, England, Cyprus, and Turkey, and I do meet with them. Each time I have tried to see from the harmony they secure for the structure of society by their behaviour, religiosity, humanity, and their great learning, the way of living of their Master (Üstad) and his manifestation, silhouette, and image on them. Only in this way is it possible for me to perceive Said Nursi's breath and work out an attractive force exerted over me which I can't explain. I shall explain this further as follows:

I came across the name 'Students of the Light' (*Nur Talebe-*

leri) while organizing the German Central Institute of Islamic Archives. In 1971, I had been charged by the World Islamic Congress to establish contact with the Turkish-Muslim groups in Federal Germany and explain the possibilities of working together. At the time I was living in Zaarbrücken. And the 'Nur School' was in Rolandstrasse in Cologne. To this day even I can't forget the cordial and warm way I was welcomed. This welcoming was very different from the interest generally shown by Muslims to a German, which arose from habitual anxiety. The realization of this brotherhood is nothing other than an statement of surrendering oneself to Almighty God. It is a brotherhood that does not ask: "Where have you come from? What are you doing?", but concentrates all attention and interest of the meeting on that moment, and in this way gives the signal of a warm encounter and acceptance. At this stage my two companions were Zeki and Nafi Şevkli. Nafi Şevkli undertook the role of interpreter, 'the bridge from heart to heart.'

In subsequent years, Nafi Şevkli shared in the happiness that working together with people of different cultures brings and used to warn me of the dangers. When he left Germany, I lost a most valuable brother given me by Almighty God.

Divine Determining attracted the hostility of many people onto me. And in comparison I had very few loyal and sincere friends. The time I have spent with sincere friends such as that, I consider to be the most valuable times of my life.

In addition, before anything else, my getting to know Mehmet Nuri Güleç and Mehmet Emin Birinci and their taking an interest is of greater value than can be measured by gold. Each of them, as living reflections of their Master, enriched my life like filling in a mosaic with the stones.

Said Nursi's spirit lives in the existence and effectiveness of his community. I found the opportunity to know Said Nursi and appreciate him profoundly from the actions and words of his

students.

While establishing and organizing the Consultative Islamic Council of Germany and the German Central Institute of Islamic Archives, a Christian friend said to me: "In my opinion, the Nur community is like your 'defence force;' always loyal, all the time trustworthy, a community that in no way can be made to falter and that pays no attention to rumours."

He grasped the very gist of the matter with these words. From the point of view of historical fact, I can't pass without saying this, this 'defence force' experienced a brief faltering due to acting together with another organization from the same country in 1982-3, but in spite of this, Said Nursi's students are my most sincere friends, as individuals they have my complete confidence and are all the time like that.

I am not a member of Said Nursi's movement. When Mehmet Emin Birinci visited me in 1978 in Zaarbrücken, he gave me a most precious gift which bound me to him. While bidding me good-bye, he took the ring off his finger and handed it to me. It was a silver ring set with a piece of agate beloved of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). A ring that was not ostentatious but looked inward. A most precious ring. I have worn it ever since and never taken it off to this day. This ring always reminds me of my bonds with my friends and recalls them to me. And it also warns me not to fall behind them in sincerity. In 1979 a campaign was started to blacken the Nur community in Germany. With undertaking the duty of answering this, for the first time I showed this loyalty.

Then, CIBEDO, the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Document Centre, using all the means at its disposal, partly in Istanbul and partly in Zaarbrücken, did all it could to prevent the study written by me being published. At the same time the work is a basic source concerning the Nurju movement. When CIBEDO insisted that this work was not published, I left it. At the same

time, this caused me material loss and was the start of hostility towards me, and today even it has a negative influence on Muslim-Christian relations. These negative effects have also been very damaging for the German Central Institute of Islamic Archives and the Consultative Council of Islamic Societies.

Using all the means they can, this hostility has been the cause of all the efforts to show Islam in a positive and objective way being made ineffective. In spite of my bad experiences concerning dialogue with non-Muslims such as this, I believe in its necessity through the inspiration I have received from the ideas of Said Nursi. In all sincerity I am in favour of dialogue between Muslims and Christians. And I want to say this, that the churches are "institutions of concern and self-interest." And they see us Muslims as "their main and most serious rivals." In this way the churches show their true face (their strategies). Such a method is entirely contrary to Islam. At the same time, this is Said Nursi's view.

My brothers who are members of the Nur community have been the means of my twice receiving what were entirely Divine favours. I am indebted to them in this respect. I was twice saved from terrible plots in which I was face to face with the danger of death. I observed clearly the manifestation of Divine favours in regard to me, although I did not deserve them.

Said Nursi recalls at a very high level the person of the Prophet Job. Because throughout all the severe hardships and trials which could have overturned his life, he did not depart one iota from his love and attachment to Almighty God. Said Nursi was sent before courts of law seven times because of his faith, and he passed more than twenty years in exile. The aim in this was to cow him and destroy him completely. Neither the courts nor the exiles were able to form obstacles to the light he spread.

In 1981, an end was put to my duties in West German Radio, Hessen-Saar State Radio, and The Voice of Germany Radio. The reasons put forward for this, according to the opinions of these broadcasting companies, was my being the "religious extremist spokesman of the Süleymancıs" and a member of the Islamic World Congress. I was able to endure these overwhelmingly difficult times through the lessons I had taken from the model life of Said Nursi Hazretleri. Later I learnt that this charge of being "Defender of the Süleymancıs" had been instigated by my fellow believers. The campaign started against me by my brothers was because of my policy of dialogue and opening up. In this way, they accused me of "treachery towards Islam" and wanted to anathematize me.

As I said, I am not a member of the Nur community. And I am not one of Said Nursi's students. Before everything, the reason Said Nursi forms a model personality is that I have in part experienced in my own life the periods and trials he experienced in his life. And before everything the fact that his students actualize his principles in their lives. I am not the student of the great Master from Nurs, but I am the friend of his students and I beseech Almighty God that this sincere friendship will remain thus precious for all eternity.

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ŞÜKRAN VAHİDE

(Writer, researcher - TURKEY)

Şükran Vahide was born in Lancashire, England, in 1949. In 1980 she graduated from the Persian Dept. of the School of Oriental Studies in Durham University, and in 1981 she became a Muslim after reading English translations of the Risale-i Nur. Now living in Turkey, Şükran Vahide writes and researches on the Risale-i Nur and its author, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, whose biography she has written. She has translated foremost Sözler (The Words) and many parts of the Risale-i Nur into English. Her published works include:

1. Islam, The West, and the Risale-i Nur (1987).
2. The Author of the Risale-i Nur, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1992).
3. The Words (trans. 1993).